

Acupuncturists Without Borders Organizes Hurricane Relief Efforts

Kristen E. Porter, PhD, MS, MAC, LAc; Elizabeth Sommers, PhD, MPH, LAc

Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath have elicited an unprecedented response from acupuncturists and supporters throughout the country. Acupuncturists Without Borders (AWB), an organization that has mobilized to provide care and services for individuals affected by the storm and related tragedy, has been active since September doing fundraising, organizing logistics, and assembling trained personnel. Teams of acupuncturists plan to travel to Louisiana and Mississippi to provide relief efforts.

Diana Fried, AWB director, states that the organization has been "absolutely awestruck by the outpouring of response in the acupuncture community to our call for help with the relief effort. The caliber of the replies, the offers, the thoughtful and gracious words, the extraordinary mix of skills and experience, have given us huge inspiration to carry this vision forward."

Community responses of this type were first mounted after the Sep. 11, 2001 terrorist attack in New York and other cities on the East Coast. Using ear acupuncture and National Acupuncture Detoxification Association (NADA) approaches, treatment has been provided to thousands of individuals. The focus of treatment is on minimizing physical and psychological stress related to disaster or tragedy.

Fried emphasized that AWB is an organization "of, by, and for acupuncturists throughout the country. Our work is an intersection of community building and public health."

According to the group's Web site (www.acuwithoutborders.org), acupuncture is well-suited to providing trauma relief because it is simple, flexible, effective, and economical. It can be used for everyone involved in a traumatic situation - those directly affected, rescue personnel, acupuncturists themselves. Auricular treatment can be done without extensive verbal discussion, and is thus highly relevant for individuals who are not comfortable speaking the dominant language or who are unable to communicate verbally because of feeling overwhelmed or emotionally numb. Individuals who might not seek treatment for acute stress may be open to trying acupuncture, and the group atmosphere can help to address survivors' isolation.

Acupuncture can be adapted to a variety of settings, and Fried pointed out that AWB's work is in harmony with that of other international efforts such as the Guatemala Medical Acupuncture Project (GUAMAP), the PanAfrican Acupuncture Project (PAAP), and supportive efforts in Honduras.

The core team of Acupuncturists Without Borders consists of Fried (NM), Robin Beckman (WA), Laura Cooley (NH), Patricia Karnowski (CA), Sue Larkin (MA), Nityamo Lian (NM), Laure Liverman (NM), John Macdonald (NY), and Cynthia Neipris (NY). This group of acupuncture providers represents a wide variety of expertise and experience including serving individuals living with HIV/AIDS,

coordinating efforts to provide wellness programs for people in New York affected by 9/11, providing chemical dependency and recovery-oriented treatment, and evaluation of acupuncture treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder.

Fried explained that AWB has a team approach to disaster relief, and has been in discussions with the American Red Cross, disaster relief coordinators, and other local agencies to coordinate response. "Getting food, water, and shelter to survivors are primary goals. Once these are established, providing acupuncture treatment makes sense. We've been working to create the infrastructure and logistics to support ongoing service."

One of the main challenges to a seamless roll-out of services on the national level is the issue of reciprocity; acupuncture licenses are issued on a state-by-state basis and, unlike licenses for medical doctors, do not yet have the tradition of being honored across states in times of crisis. A longer-term goal of AWB is to work with Congressional representatives, state licensing boards, and the legal system to create new precedents for allowing reciprocal privileges. Education is the key to promoting understanding about the training, experience, and scope of acupuncture practice.

Although the logistics of specific locations where treatment teams will be sent in the hurricane-affected areas are still being organized, Fried affirmed that Louisiana will be the home of initial AWB efforts. AWB is also negotiating with officials at the Astrodome about locating acupuncture services there. The group plans to have teams consisting of at least five members at each site providing treatment throughout the day. Sites in Mississippi are being planned as well.

Evaluation efforts to determine the success of the work are also in the planning stages. Utilization and treatment outcomes will be of primary interest. Nityamo Lian, who recently completed an NIH-funded project that focused on acupuncture and the treatment of PTSD, will lead these activities.

Licensed acupuncturists and acupuncture detox specialists who are interested in volunteering are encouraged to do so via the AWB Web site. "Our goal is to have team members stay for a minimum of one week, and preferably for two weeks or longer," Fried explained.

AWB is working on obtaining organizational 501(c)3 non-profit status. Donations can currently be sent to Elk Mountain Healing Center (contact information below). The AOM Alliance and NADA have also been collecting donations for AWB.

Fried also pointed to the efforts of some of the schools in promoting AWB's development and growth. "The Academy of Five Element Acupuncture has directed major efforts that support our group. Likewise, Pacific College of Oriental Medicine has been leading the way by organizing fundraising efforts."

Besides making monetary donations, supplies are also urgently needed. Donations of half-inch ear needles, cotton, tissues, and alcohol swabs are welcome.

The long-term plan of AWB is to "create a world-class organization of acupuncturists who provide community-style acupuncture in the U.S. as well as internationally." Fried further envisions that the group will "focus on regions where there has been war and conflict, including U.S. inner cities, or in the aftermath of disaster. We are interested in supporting local groups who are concerned with the effects of trauma within their communities. Our focus will be on the training as much as on the treatment"

For further information, individuals can contact AWB at www.acuwithoutborders.org or send an e-mail to info@acuwithoutborders.org.

Donations can be made through the following organization:

Elk Mountain Healing Center
ATTN: AWB
22 Forrest Tallman Rd
Orford, NH 03777

Please make checks to Elk Mountain - AWB/Katrina Relief. All contributions are tax-deductible.

References

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3. Toomim R. Treating many where treatment is needed most: current and historic use of acupuncture for post-traumatic stress and crisis support. *Acupuncture Alliance Forum* Winter 2001-2002:10-17.

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